



# The ISC Newsletter

International Society of Cryptozoology

Autumn 1986  
Vol. 5, No. 3

Editor  
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The ISC Newsletter is an official publication of the International Society of Cryptozoology, and is published for Society members and institutional subscribers. Membership is \$25 annually; institutional subscriptions are \$35. Membership and subscription inquiries and correspondence, should be addressed to ISC, Box 43070, Tucson, AZ 85733, USA; (602) 884-8369.

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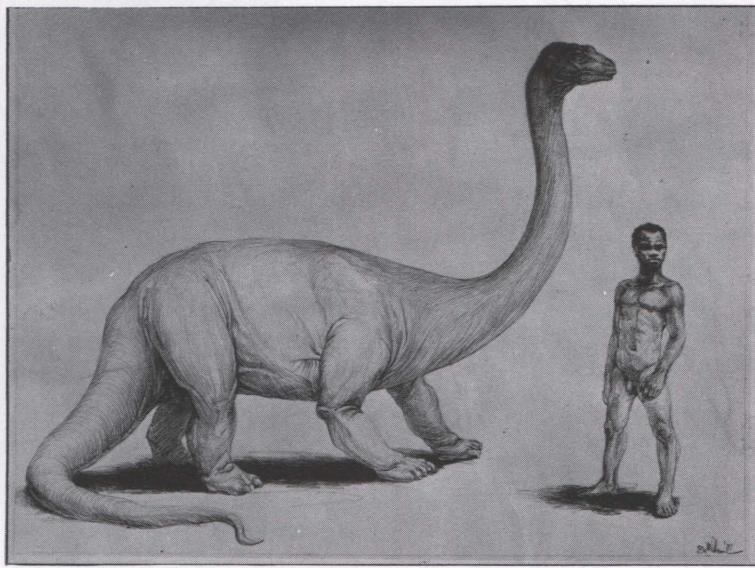
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ISSN 0741-5362

## MOKELE - MBEMBE: NEW SEARCHES, NEW CLAIMS



Mokeye-Mbembe according to Congolese descriptions. This rendition is by artist David Miller under the direction of Roy Mackal.

Since the American and Congolese expeditions of 1981 and 1983, new developments have occurred concerning Mokeye-Mbembe, said to be a large and amphibious African animal resembling a Mesozoic sauropod dinosaur. A British expedition, beset with many problems, went into the Congo swamps in early 1986, but failed to observe the animal. Herman Regusters, meanwhile, claims to have a dinosaur bone—which he links to Mokeye-Mbembe—dated at only a few thousand years old, not the 65 million years one would expect. Many of these events are complicated and intertwined. A chronological review up to the autumn of 1986 follows.

The modern search for Mokeye-Mbembe began in the 1970's, when James Powell collected reports in Gabon while studying crocodiles. He consulted extensively with Bernard Heuvelmans, who had amassed an enormous amount of information on such sightings in

different parts of Africa--often going under different native names--which was published in his book Les Derniers Dragons d'Afrique (Plon, 1978). Eventually, Powell teamed up with Roy Mackal, a University of Chicago biochemist, who, after studying the whole problem, proposed that a good place to look was in the Likouala swamps of the People's Republic of the Congo. Mackal and Powell went together to the Congo and gathered considerable new information from the natives. Mackal then planned a larger expedition for 1981, teaming up with Richard Greenwell at the University of Arizona, and Herman Regusters, an engineering consultant to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in California.

A printing error on the front page of the Summer, 1986, Newsletter, indicated Vol. 5, No. 6. The correct issue number should have read Vol. 5, No. 2.

Disagreements soon arose between Mackal and Regusters. Regusters perceived Mackal as a plodding and inefficient academic, while Mackal regarded Regusters as being prone to great exaggeration and having serious misconceptions about zoology and ecology. A press conference given by Regusters, in which he stated that the expedition would be penetrating an area inhabited by headhunters and cannibals, resulted in a separation of the two in early July, 1981, with Regusters then forming his own, separate expedition.

Both expeditions operated in the Congo in the autumn of 1981 but never met. The Mackal group, which then included University of Arizona geomorphologist Justin Wilkinson, returned with little new evidence (see "Congo Expedition Inconclusive," *Newsletter*, Spring, 1982). Regusters, however, claimed to have seen Mokele-Mbembe on several occasions in Lake Telle, a location which Mackal had targeted after learning about it from the natives, but then abandoned. Regusters was not able to produce conclusive evidence of his sightings, as his photographs were of poor quality. A dispute then occurred over the depth of the lake, with Regusters claiming that it was "hundreds of meters" deep, while the Mackal group had obtained French hydrographic data indicating that it had an average depth of less than 10 feet, although, in a few places, it is as deep as 20 or 30 feet.

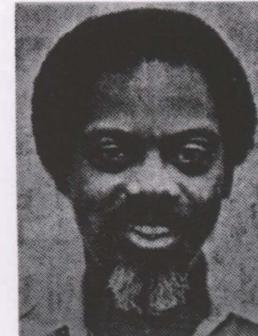
Although invited, Regusters refused to join the International Society of Cryptozoology --presumably because Mackal and Greenwell had been appointed officers of the new Society, and the Society would thus be biased. At one point, Regusters did offer the Society a technical report on the sound recordings he had obtained at Lake Telle of what he thought was Mokele-Mbembe, but a publishable

version was never received.

In the spring of 1983, the Congolese government dispatched its own expedition to the Likouala swamps. The team, headed by Congolese zoologist Marcellin Agnagna, also reached Lake Telle, and sightings of Mokele-Mbembe were again reported (see "Congolese Biologist Observes Mokele-Mbembe," *Newsletter*, Winter, 1983; "Special Interview," *Newsletter*, Summer, 1984). Agnagna claimed that he had a good 20-minute sighting through the telephoto lens of his movie camera (the little film he had left in the camera at the time proved to be useless, as the camera had been accidentally left on the "macro" setting), and that the animal was reptilian, with the general design of a sauropod, leading him to believe that Mokele-Mbembe is in fact a dinosaur. A Field Report by Agnagna was published in *Cryptozoology*, Vol. 2.

The following year, Regusters announced plans for a new expedition. Annoyed because the media and the scientific community had not accepted his sightings at face value, he stated his determination to prove the existence of the animal. Expedition members were to be John Sack, a writer in California, John Rajca, a paleontologist also in California, David Jordt, a Texas geologist, and Regusters' wife Kia VanDusen, a chiropractor, who would serve as the expedition's medical officer.

Soon afterwards, Rajca's professional role was announced in *Acts and Facts* (Vol. 14, No. 1, January 1, 1985), published by the Institute of Creation Research, in El Cajon, California. A graduate student in creation science at the Institute--and newly appointed Assistant Director and Curator of the Institute's Museum--Rajca was described as having "a strong background in herpetology and paleontology," and he was billed



Herman Regusters. The only person to have seen the inside of the jungle and returned alive?

as "the only creationist in the group." The Institute stated that the new Regusters expedition "has very strong implications as far as the theory of evolution is concerned. If this creature is indeed a living dinosaur...and can be documented as such...it would eliminate 65 million years of geologic history needed for the theory of evolution and it would also correlate with archaeological and Biblical records (Job 40:15-24)."

Regusters continued to generate publicity through press interviews in late 1984 and early 1985, when it was announced that Mark Evans, a University of Wisconsin entomologist, had joined the expedition. One of Regusters' new claims, carried by a UPI wire to hundreds of newspapers in late March, stated that his previous expedition had represented "the only people who have ever seen the inside of the jungle and returned alive." And in another lengthy article, in the *Seattle Times*, published on April 26, staff reporter Elizabeth Rhodes revealed that the Department of Planetary Sciences at the California Institute of Technology, which Regusters had listed as a cooperating institution in his press releases, had disavowed any connection with the upcoming expedition. At the time, the Society received many inquiries concerning the publicity being generated, but declined to offer any comment.

The expedition had been planned for April, 1985, but when the time came it became apparent that some of the funding sources Regusters had been depending on had dried up. In further interviews, he stated his intention to leave in May. Eventually, although a large quantity of equipment had been obtained, most of it donated by industrial firms, the second Regusters expedition did not take place. When this became apparent, Roy Mackal became interested in leading another expedition of his own. He had been hesitant to do so previously, as he did not want to be in a competitive mode with Regusters again. Mackal revealed plans for his own venture in Brighton, England, while attending the Society's July, 1985, cryptozoology symposium, held as part of the Third International Congress of Systematic and Evolutionary Biology.

Also attending this symposium was Bill Gibbons, from London, who discussed his own expedition plans with Mackal and Greenwell. Gibbons, who had had jungle survival training as a soldier in the British Army in Belize, was enthusiastic about leading his own search for Mokele-Mbembe. Although Mackal had serious reservations about Gibbons' qualifications, he supplied a large amount of information and advice, at Gibbons' request, during the following months. As it became apparent that the Gibbons project would, in fact, proceed, Mackal again canceled plans for his own proposed spring, 1986, expedition, believing that it would be too problematical for two teams to be in the same area at the same time, as had happened in 1981 with the Mackal and Regusters groups.

The British effort was unsuccessful in obtaining much interest or support from British institutions, companies, or even the media. The main sponsor was the Fortean Times, which pub-

lished updates before, during, and after the expedition, and much of the information used below has been extracted, in abbreviated form, from that publication. One rationale for the Gibbons expedition, according to the Fortean Times, was that its members would all be under 30 years of age, and that "a small team of fit, field-experienced young men will be able to accomplish more than the earlier expeditions of comparatively elderly academics." (Mackal expedition members Greenwell and Wilkinson were in their 30's, and Mackal, a Marine in World War II, still does 200 push-ups every morning, and was actually in better physical shape than Greenwell and Wilkinson.) The Fortean Times set up a special fund for Gibbons which readers could contribute to, and this helped Operation Congo get underway.

The Gibbons team, which included Mark Rothermel, Jonathan Walls, and Joe Della-Porta, left with all their equipment by ship in November, 1985, and arrived in the Congo on December 30. Five weeks were spent in the bureaucratic mill in Brazzaville, attempting to get the proper official paperwork completed in various ministries to allow the team to proceed. Many problems occurred with bringing material in, Customs permits, disappearing equipment, etc. These are all problems which both the Mackal and Regusters groups had experienced. "Perhaps the blow that hurt the most," stated the Fortean Times, "came from Dr. Roy Mackal. The day after signing a protocol, the Minister of Economy and Forests received a letter from Mackal 'urging' him to cancel Operation Congo because it does not have the financial backing, nor are any of the members experienced in conducting this kind of expedition. I strongly urge you not to allow this expedition to proceed." The Fortean Times expressed shock at Mackal's "treacherous attempt to

sabotage this effort," and that "his action is both shameful and unprofessional."

Mackal immediately wrote to the Fortean Times expressing dismay at the allegations, and enclosing a copy of his one and only letter to the Minister, sent at Gibbons' request, which in no way attempted to sabotage the expedition. The Fortean Times subsequently published an apology to Mackal, but was still critical of Mackal's position that the British group had little scientific training, and, in particular, of a statement by Greenwell, who is also British, to the effect that "people who have no training in natural history (or even good, self-taught knowledge) have no business going on such expeditions." (Later, upon the return of the Gibbons group to England, the blame for the many problems the expedition had encountered was shifted from Mackal to Marcellin Agnagna, who, as on a previous occasion--the 1981 Mackal expedition--had been assigned by the Ministry of Forests to Operation Congo.)

The different expedition members met in Impfondo in mid-March, and two additional weeks were spent awaiting the arrival of outboard motors, which never materialized. The team then flew to Epena, and after 4 days there, moved by dugout canoe down the Likouala River to the village of Dzeke, which the Mackal group had visited in 1981. A visit was made to the village of Nboukou. Later, the team spoke to Immanuel Mongoumela, an elephant hunter from Dzeke whom the Mackal and Agnagna teams had spoken to. He claimed to have seen Mokele-Mbembe three times. He took the Gibbons team to areas where a Mokele-Mbembe had supposedly been seen or heard.

Problems then arose between Agnagna and the Gibbons team, and camp was moved to the village of Boha, which "owns" Lake

Telle. Negotiations ensued to gain access to Lake Telle, and, after much haggling over the price, the village elders gave permission and supplied seven porters. The trek to Lake Telle took 2 days through difficult, swampy terrain--the same route followed by Regusters in 1981 and Agnagna in 1983. Two team members visited a small lake where Mokele-Mbembe was said to reside, but no sightings occurred. At Lake Telle, further personal disagreements arose between Agnagna and the British team, but several days were nevertheless spent at the lake, particularly in the areas where Mokele-Mbembe was believed to have been seen on previous occasions. No sightings of unidentified animals were made, and after 5 days the team returned to Boha. From Boha, the team returned to Epena, where the Gibbons-Agnagna conflicts grew so serious that Agnagna refused to accompany the British team on the river trip to the village of Botala, to take the 12-hour-trek to Bimbo and the nearest available transportation back to Impfondo.

Back at Impfondo, Pastor Eugene Thomas and his wife Sandy, who run the Evangelical Mission (and who assisted both the Mackal and Regusters expeditions) helped the Gibbons team with food and medicine, as several team members had become sick. During the stay, Gibbons was converted to Christianity, and was baptized by Pastor Thomas in the Ubangi River. Eventually, the team returned to Point Noire, where they caught a ship back to England.

Upon their return to England, Gibbons issued severe denunciations of Agnagna. He accused him of stealing equipment, threatening expedition members, and generally disrupting the successful operation of the venture. Furthermore, he accused him of fabricating the supposed letter from Roy Mackal to the Minister recommending against

the expedition. On his own part, Agnagna, in a letter to ISC, stated: "Their lack of scientific knowledge and experience obliged us to change the program and orient the investigation towards the study of mammals in the Likouala. I did all the work, as the adventurers were incapable of identifying a single animal." Agnagna also stated that "what they will tell the press upon their return will simply be inventions and lies on their part." The Society does not--and cannot--take a position on these disagreements, but it is apparent that some very different approaches in methodology, as well as serious personal conflicts, overshadowed the expedition's work.

About the same time as the return of the Gibbons group to England in June, 1986, an article by Herman Regusters appeared in Pursuit, a magazine published by the Society for the Investigation of the Unexplained, founded by the late naturalist Ivan T. Sanderson (Vol. 18, No. 4, Whole No. 72). The article, "An Interim Report on the Search for Mokele-Mbembe," contains, among other things, the new claim of a dinosaur bone said to be only a few thousand years old.

Regusters relates how he first heard of Mokele-Mbembe in a magazine article and it occurred to him to use "satellite technology" to help find the animal. "After contacting Dr. Mackal," he states, "I found he had neither a specific plan of action nor knowledge of existing earth-sensing and geo-physical-data-compilation technology, so I flew to visit him at the University of Chicago.... I offered to provide my expertise to design an expedition plan and make available my technological resources from NASA/JPL."

Many contacts and discussions with individuals in various government agencies are related,

but no federal sponsorship for the expedition ever materialized. Regusters then contacted a number of industrial corporations, some of which offered support "based upon the fact that I happen to be an engineer, rather than a member of the academic community.... I believe that it was the lack of mutual modus operandi that led to the eventual separation in the relationship between Mackal and myself--a difference in methodology and approach. To me, his approach was from a very theoretical and idealistic direction, with a lesser latitude for practicality and contingencies."

Regusters then describes his 1981 expedition, the results of "voiceprints" on the recording he made (supposedly of Mokele-Mbembe) and, finally, his dramatic claim of having a sauropod dinosaur bone in his possession which dates from only a few thousand years B.P.

He first relates the uncovering of some dinosaur bones in the desert of Niger, in the sub-Saharan region of West Africa: "The bones," he states, "were definitely identified by French and Italian researchers as belonging to a sauropod species of dinosaur--now classified as Ouranosaurus." Through a contact in Niger, Regusters acquired a vertebra from this find. He then links Ouranosaurus to Mokele-Mbembe, stating that the approximate length of the animal he observed in Lake Telle in 1981 was 35 feet, while the complete articulated skeleton of the Ouranosaurus found in Niger measures 12 meters, or 39 feet, "and generally conformed to the profile of the Lake Telle animal."

Regusters had the bone examined by many qualified individuals at numerous institutions, including the University of California (Los Angeles and Berkeley), University of Arizona, the U.S. Geological Sur-

vey, the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, and Tokyo University. His inquiries, he states, resulted in opinions that the vertebra bone originated in the very recent past, demonstrating that dinosaurs not only survived the great extinctions at the Cretaceous-Tertiary boundary, about 65 million years ago, but they still existed at least several thousand years ago. Scientific evidence for a living sauropod species in Africa within the last several thousand years would certainly add great weight to claimed observations of sauropods alive at the present time.

The first expert contacted by Regusters was Rainer Berger, at the Institute of Geophysics and Planetary Physics, University of California, Los Angeles. Berger is quoted as stating: "This bone is of far too recent origin to make use of my laboratory. I would guess that this bone is a little over a million years." Regusters himself states: "There should be little doubt that I was astonished by his comment. When I asked about his making such a statement in light of the supposition that all dinosaurs died 65 million years ago, he replied, 'I am giving my opinion based on my experience with thousands of dinosaur bones. In science, what is so



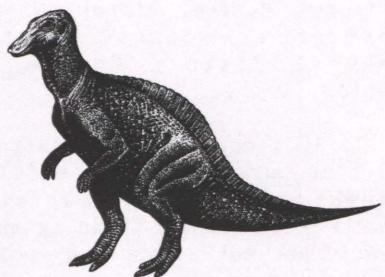
The vertebral bones of Ouranosaurus uncovered by desert winds in Niger. (Institute of Paleontology, National Museum of Natural History, Paris.)

should not be denied to support other purposes.' This confirmed my impression of Dr. Burger [sic] as being a highly enlightened, forthright person, and a true scientist."

Regusters also showed the bone to George Jefferson, at the Page Museum (the LaBrea "tar pits" division of the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History). Regusters states: "After viewing the bone sample [Jefferson] commented that, in his estimation, the condition of the specimen, based on his experience with more recent fossil bones, seemed to indicate an age of perhaps several million years, at any rate, far younger than the 65-100-million-year period."

Next, Regusters relates the analyses performed by the Accelerator Facility for Radioisotope Analysis, operated jointly by the Departments of Physics and Geosciences at the University of Arizona. This accelerator is one of a handful in the world which can be used for very accurate carbon 14 (C-14) dating of artifacts (the facility will soon be analyzing a strand from the famous Shroud of Turin). Regusters submitted some of the dinosaur material for analysis by Arizona researchers Tim Jull and Thomas Stafford, who issued a report in June of 1984. Regusters states: "The bottom line conclusion extended by all the above chemical and radiometric analyses of the estimated/indicated date of the bone sample was between 10,000 and 70,000 years old!"

If the results from these analyses by qualified scientists do, in fact, demonstrate a dinosaur age as recent as several thousand years B.P., this would represent one of the major paleobiological discoveries of all time, and would cause major upheavals throughout the scientific world. Needless to say, cryptozoology would also benefit significantly by proof of dino-



Artist's rendition of Ouranosaurus, a bipedal iguanodontid. (British Museum [Natural History].)

saur persistence into the recent past. However, there are a number of problems with Regusters' claims which need to be clarified, so that the full facts are available to all, and are properly interpreted.

In the first place, Ouranosaurus was not a sauropod dinosaur at all. Two Orders of dinosaurs are recognized, the Saurischia and the Ornithischia. A principal differentiation in the two Orders is the hip configuration, with the ornithischians having a more bird-like hip. Sauropods were strictly of the saurischian Order. They were bulky, quadrupedal animals, such as the popularly-known Brontosaurus (now known as Apatosaurus). Ouranosaurus was an iguanodontid (a family in the ornithischian Order), and, consequently, was a biped (see illustration).

Ouranosaurus was first found in the Niger desert in 1966, and a site containing several specimens was excavated by a French team from the National Museum of Natural History, in Paris. One striking peculiarity about Ouranosaurus is the series of large spines emanating from the vertebral column. Most paleontologists think that these spines formed a large ridge down the back of the animal, which might have served as a solar collector, or, alternatively, as a radiator to cool the animal down in the heat of the day. A complete skeleton of an Ouranosaurus is mounted in the

National Museum, Niamey, Niger. Another is mounted in the Natural History Museum in Venice, Italy.

It is incorrect for Regusters to link Ouranosaurus to Mokele-Mbembe, unless he is claiming that Mokele-Mbembe is an iguanodontid and not a sauropod--which is not the case. Iguanodontids such as Ouranosaurus were not aquatic or swamp-dwelling animals, as were sauropods. They were bipedal, and do not conform with the descriptions given by the Congo natives of Mokele-Mbembe.

Because of the seriousness of the claim, the Editor sought verification from the three above-named experts whom Regusters states support a recent age for the Ouranosaurus vertebra in his possession. A letter was addressed to C. Rainer Berger, enclosing a copy of Regusters' article, and requesting a comment on the statements attributed to him. Because of a heavy travel schedule, Berger was unable to respond in writing, but in a telephone conversation with the Editor he stated that he was shocked that such statements had been attributed to him, and he denied their accuracy. He stated that he had been "entirely misquoted," and what he had stated "has been taken totally out of context." He stated that the bone he had been shown was too old for analysis in his laboratory (which specializes in Pleistocene--not dinosaur--fossils), not too recent, as Regusters had claimed. Berger, in addition, requested that his opinion on possible surviving dinosaurs be published with his refutation. His judgment is that all dinosaurs became extinct about 65 million years ago, in accordance with the fossil record, and he has grave doubts about any reports of dinosaurs surviving to the present or recent past.

The second expert consulted was George Jefferson of the Page

(LaBrea) Museum. Jefferson responded in writing, stating the following: "Mr. Regusters and I had a long discussion about the specimen in question.... I feel that his report of our conversation is incomplete and misleading. Initially, Mr. Regusters asked how the fossil vertebra might be aged, and could I give him an age estimate. I said that it is impossible to estimate the age of a specimen based on the degree of fossilization, and that it could be anything from millions to hundreds of millions of years old.... I noted that it was well-preserved, much like other dinosaurian materials from the Mesozoic of the western United States, Utah, and northern Arizona. As I recall, my guess was Jurassic. I commented that, although the specimen was fully permineralized, it could be as young as several millions of years old. However, this would require unusual geological conditions, but is not impossible. Apparently, Mr. Regusters has focused on and reported what he wanted to hear.... I think his use of my statements falls below the professional standards required in scientific documentation."

Concerning the analyses done at the University of Arizona, Tim Jull provided the Editor with a copy of the 1984 report. On the first analysis performed, a date of about 9,300 years B.P. was obtained. The report states: "However, I believe it is important to exercise caution in interpreting this value, as it is a C-14 date on calcite. Carbonate dates are notoriously inaccurate, as the carbonate C exchanges with ground water." The second analysis indicated an age of about 5,600 years B.P., but the report noted: "It is important to emphasize that this material is an extremely small component of the total material, about 56 ppm, and could easily be organic contamination. Thus, we feel that the 'age' of a small organic fraction is of

little meaning to dating the whole sample."

The report concludes thusly: "We can only say that neither measurement of ours adds much to your knowledge of this particular sample. At some stage in the past (about 9,300 years ago), exchange with ground water may have been present. Secondly, there is some organic material or nonbone material, of a more recent age (about 5,600 years old)."

In his letter to the Editor, Jull stated that he would like to clarify some points with regard to the above 1984 report. He emphasized that the sample dated at 9,300 years B.P. "contained a lot of carbonate, and it is my opinion that this date on the carbonate could represent a time of the secondary alteration of the material." On the analysis rendering a date of 5,600 years B.P., Jull stated that "the organic material was not identified specifically, and is a very small amount of material, so its origin is questionable. It has a stable C-13/C-12 isotope ratio of -26.5 per mil, which is not consistent with bone protein. It could be an organic residue from the acid reagents used." In other words, the dates indicated by both analyses were probably a result of contamination of the samples by outside agencies.

"I suspect very strongly," Jull concluded, "that the two dates can be explained by secondary carbonate contamination formation in the first instance, and a small amount of organic contamination in the second. The acid treatment used in the second step was too strong and would probably have dissolved much of the collagen if any remained intact.... The obvious mineralization of the material indicates that it is likely to be beyond the range of C-14 dating.... I and my colleagues do not wish to speculate on the age of this sample without fur-

ther analysis of this or any new sample which might be obtained. We have drawn no ultimate conclusions or prejudices as to the age of the material; we just believe the dating at present is inconclusive."

Regusters names and sometimes quotes numerous other individuals in his article, but it is simply not feasible to communicate with all of them for their opinions or verification of their statements. Nevertheless, it seems clear that: 1) Ouranosaurus was not a sauropod, and has nothing whatsoever to do with modern reports of Mokele-Mbembe, other than the fact that its fossils were recovered in

Africa; and 2) the claim of the recent age of the vertebra of Ouranosaurus is not supported by scientific analysis or scientific opinion. These conclusions, of course, have no bearing one way or another on sighting reports of Mokele-Mbembe itself, even those by Regusters.

As for further fieldwork on Mokele-Mbembe, Roy Mackal has expressed new interest now that the troubled Gibbons expedition is over. However, although Mackal feels that anybody who wants to should have a crack at Mokele-Mbembe, he insists on having the swamps to himself during the period that he is

there. "There is no point whatsoever in two groups being in the same place at the same time," he states. "It is simply a waste of resources, and puts them into a competitive situation, which should not be necessary." As to Regusters' new claims, Mackal states: "I would prefer to withhold comment, as the facts pretty much speak for themselves. The only thing I would say is that Herman always had a disposition for overstating the case."

So ends the latest chapter in the Mokele-Mbembe saga. The animal itself, however, if it exists at all, remains as elusive as ever. □

## GIANT FISH REPORTED IN CHINA

In August, 1985, both AP and UPI wired dispatches from Beijing, People's Republic of China, reporting the discovery of enormous, red fish in a remote lake in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of northwestern China. The report, originating with the Xinhua News Agency, quoted Professor Xiang Ligai, of the biology department of Xinjiang University, as stating: "The mystery of monsters in Lake Hanas has been solved." The fish, he stated, were a giant species of salmon reaching a size of over 30 feet.

Xinhua stated that Professor Xiang had observed the fish through binoculars for a long period of time in July. "Professor Xiang could clearly make out the head, spiny rays, and tail fin. He estimated it was about 10 meters long." Legends of "monsters" in Lake Hanas go back a long time, according to Xinhua, which quoted an old Mongolian villager as describing "a lot of big fish" in the lake in the 1930s. The reports concluded that a team of geologists from the Xinjiang Environmental Protection Institute later "confirmed the discovery, spotting

100 red fish." Their weight was estimated at about 1 ton each.

Reluctant to print this remarkable claim in the Newsletter without further details and, preferably, first-hand accounts, the Editor withheld publication while inquiries were made. Forrest Wood, then an ISC Board member, wrote to Professor Xiang, but no answer was ever received, possibly because of the language barrier. Hoping to shed some light on the matter, the Editor consulted with several ichthyologists, without productive results.

Finally, in April, 1986, the official Chinese magazine China Reconstructs (published in English), presented a short article on the topic, with additional information. As China Reconstructs is considered a reliable publication, these additional details are provided here.

Lake Hanas (which does not appear in the Editor's large Times Atlas of China), is said to have an average depth of about 500 feet. It is narrow, and has a length of 15 miles.

The article, written by Wen Jiao, first discusses local legends and beliefs in the "lake monsters." It was said that when the monsters are "happy," they chase each other around the lake, causing large waves. The village head, a Mongolian, related a story from his grandfather's youth: a team of horses once disappeared at the lakeside; a search party found hoofprints up to the water's edge, but no bodies or remains of the horses were found. "However, all this is hearsay," writes Wen. "There is no proof of anything, nor are there any written historical records."

Wen then relates an incident which is verified, involving a large suspension net lowered in the lake in 1980 by technicians from the Xinjiang Aquatic Products Bureau. The net, weighing 1 ton and measuring several hundred meters in length, was being used as part of a study of the lake's resources. When the technicians returned 2 days later, the net had disappeared, but they subsequently found it in another part of the lake. It had been "crushed, battered, and violently thrown about."

The China Reconstructs article then moves on to relating the events of 1985, and essentially confirms the previous report (above). In July, a group of biology and geography students arrived at Lake Hanas to draw up plans for a possible nature reserve in the area. On July 24, the students, led by Professor Xiang Lihao (not Xiang Ligai), climbed to an observation tower built 2 years earlier on the lake's western side. A student pointed to a part of the lake, exclaiming, "Look, what's that?" Everybody saw several large reddish shapes on the lake's surface about 1,000 feet distant. The objects reportedly formed a triangle and then a straight line. One of the students had taken along a pair of binoculars, and used them to observe the red objects. "They look like fish!" he exclaimed.

Professor Xiang took the binoculars and observed the objects, concurring with the student's assessment. However, the article does not mention the

professor's previously reported opinion that the fish were salmon. All it states is that "fish of this description" are found in the Arctic Ocean "and the river systems connected with it."

The next morning Professor Xiang was back at the observation tower with binoculars and camera. At 9 a.m. he spotted the giant, slow-moving fish again, and observed them pushing their heads above the surface. Their heads were reportedly the size of automobile tires. As the sun rose, more fish became visible, until about 60 were observable. "He took as many photos as he could," Wen wrote, "and from one of his color shots it was possible to estimate the length of one [fish] stretched out over the distance between two trees on the bank--more than 10 meters" (about 33 feet). The professor continued observing all day, and as the sun began to set the fish gradually disappeared from sight.

On July 27, an attempt was made to actually catch one of the fish. The students had two extra large fishhooks made by a blacksmith at a village 40 miles away, bought 300 feet of nylon rope, and made a raft from a tree trunk. They then attached sheep legs to the hooks, which were fastened to the rope, and sank them in the lake where the giant fish had been seen. They tied the other end of the rope to a large tree on the bank. Nothing took the bait for 2 days, and on the third day they replaced the sheep legs with wild ducks. This attempt also failed to produce a specimen.

To end the article, Wen asks if the denizens of the lake are "merely large fish." In fact, 30-foot salmon would be truly phenomenal, and monsters in their own right. The largest strictly freshwater fish in the world are only 10 to 15 feet in length (see Wood's Animal Facts column, this issue). Hopefully, additional information will eventually reach the Society. □

## BLUFF CREEK REMEMBERED

Most persons interested in Sasquatch will have heard of--or even seen--the famed 1967 Patterson-Gimlin film footage, labeled a hoax by debunkers and the best evidence on record by many proponents, including a number of scientists. Roger Patterson died in 1972, but Bob Gimlin, the less well-known of the two, is alive and well in Yakima, Washington. He was interviewed in December 1985 by Ed Pehhale of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, who described him as "a slow-talking cowboy who raises quarter horses."

"I'd have been better off if I said a long time ago that I believe it was a man in a fur suit because I took so much ridicule about it," said Gimlin, who has never profited financially from the film. "But

Roger's been dead a long time now, so I kind of feel I owe it to people to tell about what we saw. We made the bend [in Bluff Creek, northern California]...here this thing stood by the creek, just stood. We were on one side of the creek, and the creature on the other, and our horses went crazy. Roger's little horse just went bananas." Patterson then reportedly grabbed the movie camera from his saddle bags.

"As all this was going on," Gimlin continued, "this creature turned and started to walk away from us, just slow like a man would if he were just walking down the street, but as it did this, Roger ran across the creek behind it, but then he stumbled on a sandbar. It was all happening boom, boom, boom. He was

shooting the camera while he was running. He hollered...'Cover me!', and, naturally, I knew what he meant. So I rode across the creek on my horse and took my 30.06 rifle out of the saddle scabbard and just stood there--pointing but not aiming the rifle at the beast.

"When I did this," said Gimlin, "this creature was quite a little ways away from me--about 90 feet--and it turned as it was walking. It never stopped walking. And then...I heard Roger say, 'Oh, my God, I ran out of film.' What he'd been doing was taking scenery-type pictures all the way up..."

Does Gimlin believe in Sasquatch today? "There's no question in my mind, none whatsoever," he stated. Members will find the famous "still" shot from the movie on the cover of the Summer, 1984, Newsletter.

## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

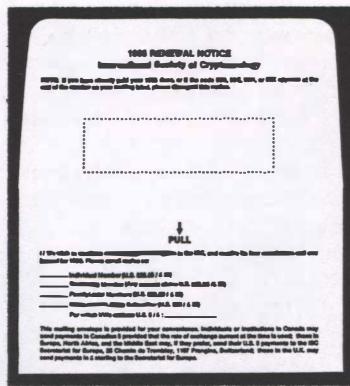
As the end of the year approaches--and may be over by the time you read this--members, especially new 1986 members, begin to wonder what the procedure is for renewing for 1987; some members simply send in their renewal payments unsolicited. I would like to clarify here what the procedures are.

Although some advance renewals are always welcome (and, indeed, help to alleviate our usual end-of-the-year cash flow problems!), overall, members are requested to wait until they have received the journal and the last (Winter) newsletter containing the self-addressed, return-renewal envelope -- and then to renew right away. This envelope, pictured here for easy identification, is very important for the renewal process, as the information contained in it is used by an input operator to process each membership renewal in the Society's computerized records. Although we try to ensure that all renewals are processed, sometimes there are slip-ups if the return-renewal envelope is not returned with

the payment. We particularly request members in other countries to use these envelopes, even when they are paying separately by means of an international bank draft.

The Society expends a large amount of time, energy, and money on sending reminder notices later in the year to those members who have not yet renewed. These costs and efforts detract from other Society functions, so members are encouraged to renew on time if possible. Membership will remain at \$25 for 1987--for the sixth year in a row. An extra \$5, \$10, or more (strictly voluntary, of course) is always welcome, and makes the donor a Sustaining Member. A list of each year's Sustaining Members is published in every Winter newsletter.

One more area in which members can help make our clerical job a little easier is to inform us promptly of new addresses when changes of residence occur (or, better still, not to change residence!). The Society has to pay the U.S. Postal Service for



The Society's return-renewal envelope which all members are requested to use.

each address change it receives when a member has not notified the Society beforehand. Even so, some members have neglected to notify both ISC and the Postal Service, and the publications are then returned to the Society. The Society has a stack of such returned publications, which members have paid for, but which remain undeliverable.

I want to express our appreciation to all members for their cooperation with these problems.

J. Richard Greenwell  
Editor

## 1987 MEETINGS SCHEDULED

The Sixth Annual Membership Meeting of the Society has been scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, July 25-26, in Edinburgh, Scotland. This unprecedented 2-day event--the Society's second Membership Meeting in Europe--will be hosted by the Royal Museum of Scotland (formerly the Royal Scottish Museum), whose Curator of Mollusca, David Heppell, serves on the Society's Board of Directors (see *Newsletter*, Summer, 1986). Mr. Heppell will chair and moderate the meeting, and will also host the Board of Directors Meeting the day before the Membership Meeting.

Because of the meeting's geo-

graphic setting, it has been decided, for the first time, to concentrate on a theme, which is "The Search for Nessie in the 1980s." It is anticipated that the major field researchers at Loch Ness will give presentations, and it will be the first time that a major scientific institution lends support to a conclave on the controversial question of the supposed Loch Ness monsters.

Also, by special accord, the gathering will be a joint meeting of the International Society of Cryptozoology and the Scottish Branch of the Society for the History of Natural History (SHNH), based at the British

Museum (Natural History). The second day of the meeting (a half-day session) will be dedicated to cryptozoological cats. A full program is being organized, and complete details will appear in subsequent newsletters (members in Europe will also receive a circular letter in the spring).

Meanwhile, it is important that members wishing to attend preregister as soon as possible. The administration of the Museum, conscious of the need to address the question of Nessie openly and objectively, has decided--with ISC's agreement--to open the meeting to the general public, and the Museum will promote the event in Scotland. The public will be charged a nominal 1-pound admission fee to



The historical city of Edinburgh will be the setting for the Society's 1987 Membership Meeting, to be hosted by the Royal Museum of Scotland.

help defray expenses. Members of ISC and SHNH--or members of the public who join either Society at the Meeting--will be admitted free. However, first preference will be given to ISC/SHNH members who have pre-registered by mail (such members will also need to pay their renewal dues if they have let their membership lapse).

All ISC members and prospective members who can do so are urged to attend this most ambitious Membership Meeting yet. Although most attending members will be from Europe, particularly Britain, U.S. members should consider attending the meeting as part of a Scottish vacation.

All members or prospective members planning to attend, regardless of where they reside, should preregister right away by writing a short note to: Mr. David Heppell, Department of Natural History, Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh, Scotland EH1 1JF, U.K.

Neither the Museum nor the Society will be making hotel (or meal) arrangements; attending members are encouraged to make their own arrangements as soon as possible, as Edinburgh will be at the height of its tourist season in July. Consideration is being given, however, to organizing a bus tour--immediately after the meeting--to

Inverness and Loch Ness, and back to Edinburgh. This would necessitate at least one overnight stay in the Inverness-Loch Ness area. At this time, there is some uncertainty as to whether a sufficient number of attending members, from Britain and elsewhere, would want to participate.

The bus tour--the cost of which is still undetermined--would only be possible if a sufficient number of members signed up, rather than visiting Loch Ness on their own. Consequently, all members preregistering with Mr. Heppell are requested to state clearly whether or not they would participate in a bus tour. If a sufficient number of persons are interested, the appropriate arrangements can be made. As with the meeting program, further details on the possible bus tour will appear in forthcoming newsletters.

As usual, the 1987 Membership Meeting will begin with a social hour (in the British Bird Hall) prior to the more formal presentations, so that ISC--and, in this case, SHNH--members can meet and get to know one another. The social hour will not be open to the public. □

## CRYPTOLETTERS

*The Editor welcomes letters from readers on any topic related to cryptozoology, but reserves the right to shorten them or to make slight changes to improve style and clarity, but not meaning.*

To the Editor:

I would like to report a sighting of a large, black cat right here in southeastern Oklahoma. Is it possible that there remains an undocumented species of panther like the one that resides in Florida?

In June, 1980, on a logging road in McCurtain County, Oklahoma, a black panther crossed my path within 100 feet. The cat quickly disappeared in the thick vegetation of early summer. But I clearly saw its long black tail and body in a side view that lasted about 2 seconds.

This is not the only sighting by me or other locals. Several people have witnessed the cat or cats in different places at different times. Up to the present, the animal remains undocumented with photography or physical evidence. The description of the Florida panther or the western puma resembles the ones here, except for color.

Could anybody shed some light on this matter, or is it new to everybody else too?

Kym Wilson  
Haworth, Oklahoma, U.S.A.

Although pumas or panthers (*Felis concolor*) are reported throughout the Eastern United States--see the article by Robert L. Downing in Vol. 3 of *Cryptozoology*--there has never been a verified instance of a black or melanistic puma in North America. The much larger jaguar (*Panthera onca*) is known to be melanistic, but the U.S. range of this cat is now believed to be restricted to occasional incursions into

southern Arizona. Thus, the many reports of "black panthers" throughout the country remain unexplained, at least in zoological terms.--Editor

To the Editor:

I was concerned to read the following passage in Unlocking Nature's Secrets, by Michael Bright (BBC Publications, London, 1984):

"...in the meantime, Mackal and Powell have offered a reward of two thousand dollars for skeletal remains [of Mokele-Mbembe], and are convinced that there is something unknown to science living in the remote Congo."

If this reward has indeed been offered, I would like to draw Dr. Mackal's attention to the article which he coauthored in Cryptozoology (Vol. 1), which states (pp. 71-72):

"...Depletion of large animals is occurring [in the Congo's Likouala region]...and the human danger to these species is a threat which cannot be ignored."

Surely the offer of a reward for skeletal remains of Mokele-Mbembe would precipitate precisely this "human danger" to that species, and could ultimately result in it suffering the same fate as the rest of the Likouala region's unprotected, and fast-disappearing wildlife?

Alastair Boyd  
Southend-on-Sea  
Essex, England, U.K.

To the Editor:

Concerning Karl Shuker's letter on "giant skunks" in north central Java (Newsletter, Winter, 1985), I can report the following.

When I saw the original

report put out by the Antara News Agency on May 14, 1977, I refused to believe it, so I decided to look further into the matter. Indonesia is not one of the easiest parts of the world in which to follow up stories, but at least I did ascertain that the animal in question was not a "giant skunk." It was, in fact, a new variety of giant skink--which is something altogether different!

A small number of giant skinks are found in the Australasian region, some of them measuring more than 18 inches in total length. The biggest among them is the blue-tongued giant skink (Tiliqua scincoides), which has a maximum total length of almost 24 inches, but this size is slightly exceeded by the prehensile giant skink (Corucia zebrata) of the Solomon Islands, which has a proportionately longer tail than other species, and can reach over 26 inches. Even at that size, however, a giant skink would weigh only a few pounds, compared to 70 lb. for an adult male German shepherd dog, which is the size the "giant skunks" were compared to.

The Antara News Agency, incidentally, might be called the Indonesian equivalent of the U.S.A.'s National Enquirer, and most of the stories it churns out should be treated with a pinch of salt. A classical example occurred in February, 1980, when it carried the following item:

A giant python was crushed by a bulldozer at a forest project in N. Bengkulu, SW Sumatra. The snake contained four human corpses, two of which appeared to have been recently devoured as they were still in their shorts and trousers. The operator of the bulldozer battled for over an hour with the two mammoth snakes, each reported to be about 25 meters (82.5

feet) long, before one snake was killed and the other escaped. Larger snakes have been reported.

I trust that this letter will go some way towards solving the problem of the "giant skunks."

Gerald L. Wood  
Witham, Essex, England, U.K.

Gerald Wood is the author of The Guinness Book of Animal Facts and Feats, 1982, and his column is carried on the back page of the Newsletter.--Editor

To the Editor:

Attached to this letter is an accurate drawing of an artifact housed in the Field Museum of Natural History, in Chicago. It is listed as an "unidentified animal," carved in stone by the Guetar Indians of the highlands of Costa Rica (1200-1500 A.D.).



Since the Central American highlands are an alleged site for an "American ape," this artifact may be a small part of a larger cryptozoological puzzle. Some members of the Society may find this "up their alley," and, to that end, I present it to aid in our information-sharing.

I would also like to suggest that we in the Society utilize the Newsletter to regularly share these "tid-bits" of information with one another.

Michael D. Swords  
Science Department  
Western Michigan University  
Kalamazoo, Michigan, U.S.A.

# WOOD'S ANIMAL FACTS

The largest fish which spends its whole life in fresh water is the rare pa beuk or pla buk (Pangasianodon gigas), a giant catfish found in the deep waters of the Mekong River of Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and China. According to Seidenfaden (1923), this fish attains a length of up to 9 ft. 10 in. (3 m.), and a weight of 529 lb. (240 kg.), and he says he saw one personally which measured 8 ft. 2.5 in. (2.5 m.) in length, 5 ft. 7 in. (1.7 m.) in circumference, and weighed 397 lb. (180 kg.).

In earlier times, before it was overfished, the European catfish or wels (Silurus glanis) was considered the largest freshwater fish in the world, but today this species is no longer in contention. Kessler (1856) claims the catfish found in the Dnieper River, European Russia, reached a length of 8-14 ft. (2.4-4.3 m.) and weighed up to 600 lb. (272 kg.), and he says the largest one on record measured 15 ft. (4.6 m.) and tipped the scales at 720 lb. (327 kg.). The largest accurately measured wels of which

there is reliable evidence was a 9 ft. 10 in. (3 m.) female caught in the Danube in Romania, which is now preserved in the National Museum of Natural History, in Paris.... This species, incidentally, has been dubbed a man-eater.

There are also several huge catfishes in South America. The longest -- although not the heaviest -- is the lau lau (Brachyplatystoma filamentosum), found in the rivers of Guyana as well as the Amazon, which has been credited with a maximum length of 12 ft. (3.7 m.), but 8 ft. (2.4 m.) is probably a more realistic figure. The pirahyba (Piratinga piraiba) of the Amazon River, which is closely related to the lau lau, has been called the goliath of catfishes, but very little information has been published concerning size and weight. Theodore Roosevelt (1914) was told by the doctor attached to his Brazilian expedition that...he had seen a pirahyba measuring 9 ft. 10 in. (3 m.). It had been killed by two men with machetes after it had attacked their canoe.

Some writers claim that the largest freshwater fish in the world is the pike-like arapaima (Arapaima gigas), also called the pirarucu, found in the Amazon drainage of Brazil and Peru.... When Schomburgk visited Brazil in 1836, the natives of the Rio Negro told him that they had caught pirarucu measuring 15 ft. (4.6 m.) in length and weighing 400 lb. (181 kg.), but...the two longest specimens collected by him measured 8 ft. 1.5 in. (2.48 m.) and 7 ft. (2.13 m.) respectively.... Paul Fountain (1914) claims he killed an arapaima on the Rio Negro which scaled 628 lb. (285 kg.) piecemeal, and weights of up to 1,000 lb. (454 kg.) have been reported elsewhere, but these poundages are much too extreme to be believable. Edward McTurk, a rancher at Karanambu, Guyana, who had probably seen more arapaima than any other white man, told McCormick (1949) that he once killed a fish measuring 9 ft. (2.7 m.), but it was not weighed.

Abstracted from:

The Guinness Book of Animal Facts and Feats, by Gerald L. Wood, Guinness Superlatives, Enfield, U.K. (3rd ed.), 1982.

**Honorary Members:** Andre Capart (Belgium); Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer (South Africa); David James (United Kingdom); Marie-Jeanne Koffman (Soviet Union); Ingo Krumbiegel (Federal German Republic); Theodore Monod (France); John R. Napier (United Kingdom); Sir Peter Scott (United Kingdom).

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